

Americorps Quarterly

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Get Outside and Enjoy the Snow!

by Silke Popp

It's the perfect kind of snow, not too slushy and just powdery enough that my skis make a squeaking sound as I glide through an otherwise silent forest. The occasional breeze is refreshing, despite the below freezing temperatures, as I've worked up quite a sweat making my way along the ice encrusted West Fork Creek just outside of Red Lodge, Montana.

Only a short while ago, snow was just plain old snow to me. It was cold, soggy, and quite jarring when someone flung a snowball your way. Otherwise, it translated either to a long and weary commute, or—if I got lucky—a snow day. Growing up on the East Coast, snow was almost always wet, and you came in from the cold completely chilled to the bone. Skiing or snowboarding meant making the annual pilgrimage to the Appalachian Range, along with the rest of humanity, and trying not to look entirely incompetent on artificial snow.

Out here in Montana, winter recreation takes snow to a whole new level of fun. When I relocated for my Americorps *VISTA term in a compact 4-cylinder sedan, I figured the winter

months would mean dreary workouts in the gym and sad attempts at keeping myself entertained until spring arrived. Particularly since I would spend my year in the “banana belt” of Montana, I didn't think I could find enough snow around to enjoy. While it is true that the Billings area rarely sees substantial snow, driving an hour in nearly any direction yields enough snow to make even a polar bear happy.

So, once you've found a decent patch of snow, what can you do with it? Well, out here, the options are limitless. A quick search on www.recreation.gov yields 279 publicly accessible recreation sites scattered throughout the state. What you can do with these sites is essentially limited to whatever you can dream up. Winter sports include, but are certainly not limited to the following: hiking, cross-country skiing, backcountry skiing or snowboarding, snowshoeing, camping, skijoring (if you have a dog or horse!), soaking in hot-springs, hunting or target-shooting, ice-fishing, ice-climbing, caving, snowmobiling, horseback riding, and the list could go on.

The difference in Montana is that you don't feel nearly

as cold or uncomfortable in the low-humidity, high-sunshine environment. I always wear relatively light clothing when I head outdoors because I know that as soon as I get moving I'll be peeling off the layers. Of course, there are some

has to offer in the winter. If you prefer a bit of chatter when you're on the trails, download a few podcasts for free and spend the afternoon listening to some of your favorite programs, or just listen to music. The National Park Service offers extensive

For safety's sake, it's almost always better to head outdoors with others, but if you prepare well you can avoid a lot of potentially dangerous situations. When flying solo, make sure you have a first aid/survival kit, a form of identification and pertinent medical information, and be sure to let someone know where you are going and when they should expect you back. Even if it is your mom in Alabama, let her know that you'll call her no later than some fixed time in the future. Aron Ralston—the Utah hiker forced to amputate his own arm in order to escape from under a dislodged bolder—religiously told friends where he was headed, except for that one fateful trip. It's critical to leave at least basic information about where you're headed and for how long.

Online Resources:

- www.wintermt.com: Provides up-to-date information on various winter activities around the state.
- www.reserveamerica.com: Website to find and reserve camp sites or cabins for both public and private facilities.
- www.recreation.gov: Government website that helps you explore recreational opportunities around the country.
- stardate.org: The internet's guide to stargazing
- www.nohrsc.noaa.gov/nsa: Get up-to-date snow depth maps from the National Weather Service.
- www.rendezvouskitrails.com: One of the country's best cross-country skiing sites, a pass is only five bucks, and they offer clinics coached by former Olympians, an annual ski festival, and miles of trails.
- fwp.mt.gov: Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks website provides information on hunting and other outdoor activities.

limiting factors to consider that are unique to VISTAs, that might discourage exploration of the great wintry outdoors, but here are few tips to deal with them.

It's always hard to meet new people no matter where you move, but if you move to a small town or are a solo VISTA, it can be especially difficult. Don't let that stop you from getting out and enjoying what Montana

podcasts that explore both Yellowstone and Glacier National Park; they're free and serve as an excellent companion for a visit. However, sometimes silence reigns; I am always surprised at how relaxed I feel after spending an afternoon alone in the forest. It's something of a transcendental experience to just enjoy the outdoors in complete peace and quiet.

In a state as sparsely populated as Montana, a trip into the wilderness can mean a long wait in your car if you end up stranded, and cell phone reception is rarely guaranteed; be sure that your vehicle is well-maintained, you have a gallon of water in the trunk at all times, maybe some sand and a shovel, tire chains and any other necessary safety items. A

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So Long, Farewell

by Ashley Stevick

I believe those of us who choose to serve in AmeriCorps, whether that be through Literacy Support Corps, Montana Campus Corps, Montana Conservation Corps, VISTA or Montana Making Sense, are an exceptional variety of people.

We deserve multiple pats on the back for the work we accomplish.

This particular pat goes out the January VISTA class of 2007.

On December 10th graduating VISTAs gathered in Helena for Close of Service. Lunch was served, departing paperwork was grudgingly dealt with and inspirational words poured like Guinness on St. Patty's day.

“You never know when you're going to make a difference like you have this year,” stressed Jackie Girard, the Montana State Program Director. “It's your energy that reminds us why we do what we do.”

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Brent Wilson and Ray Ross of Family Promise of Gallatin Valley at Close of Service.

ACMAC would like to congratulate Tina Maples and Heather Hass, our new Co-Coordinaors! They can be reached at tina.maples@gmail.com and hhass@carroll.edu.



The next issue of Americorps Quarterly will go out on April 14, 2008. Please send your submissions to Ashley at astevick@mtlsa.org by March 31, 2008. Remember, we're looking for stories, events and photos so get creative and don't be shy!

Staying A.L.I.V.E.

by Ebony Carter

Don’t worry, this article is not an homage to the 1977’s theme song to John Travolta’s disco Classic “Saturday Night Fever.”

A.L.I.V.E refers to the Academic Learning Integrated with Volunteer Experience, a program initiated by the University of Montana in collaboration with Americorps and Americorps VISTA.

A.L.I.V.E allows Americorps members the opportunity to earn graduate level credits through their volunteer service experience. Americorps members can earn a maximum of 18 A.L.I.V.E. credits. These credits can be used towards a graduate degree program at the University of Montana, specifically the Masters in Interdisciplinary Studies (M.I.S.). Some of the credits

are also transferable to other universities.

With the M.I.S. program a student, in consultation with a University of Montana faculty member, develops a master’s degree curriculum that caters to the professional needs of the student. The student combines two or more areas of study, such as sociology, psychology, and political science.

When the Americorps service year is completed, A.L.I.V.E. members have the following options: apply for full admission at the University of Montana under the M.I.S program to continue their studies; apply to the University as a non-degree seeking student, in case interest later develops for the M.I.S. program; lastly, if members have graduate academic interests outside of University

of Montana, those credits are eligible for transfer to a university of their choice, at the discretion of the particular school the member applies to.

A.L.I.V.E may not be for everyone, for many members are precise in their future goals. Some know off hand what they want to do, whether that’s going into teaching, becoming a doctor, or joining the PeaceCorps after their service is over. Perhaps dreams of attending another university have always been a part of the plan, or maybe not at all.

However, for those who are just unsure about future studies, or may have a slight interest in A.L.I.V.E., visit: <http://www.umt.edu/oce/alive.htm> for more information about the program, or contact Jill Beauchesene, the A.L.I.V.E coordinator, at jill.beauchesne@mso.umt.edu.

In November the AmeriCorps Member Advisory Council (ACMAC) Ambassador Committee issued a survey to AmeriCorps members statewide. The purpose of the survey was to find out how ACMAC can better serve AmeriCorps members in Montana. Over 40 members responded and provided the Ambassador Committee with numerous ideas on how to provide more support to members. A few of the suggestions include:

- Assisting new members is finding and securing safe, affordable housing
- Providing more networking opportunities
- Putting together a list of departments that offer services to low income individuals/families and where their offices are located.
- Supplying lists of contact information for other AmeriCorps members in the area
- Creating a directory of cheap places to eat and shop and stores that offer discounts to AmeriCorps members
- Perhaps put together a guide made up of comments/suggestions from previous/current members. They’ve lived in these communities, and I’m sure could give some good advice.
- Let non-ACMAC members know what they (ACMAC) are up to and what we can do to help!

Some of the suggestions are outside of the realm of ACMAC so that information will be passed along to project and site supervisors, the Corporation for National and Community Service state office and the Montana Office of Community Service. The Ambassador Committee would like to thank everyone who completed the survey for their time and candor.

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relatively minimal investment will yield substantial returns if you ever find yourself in a dangerous situation. This brings up another very important point: money. As Americorps members, we have to stretch our living stipend as far and as efficiently as possible. This is where having a hiking or recreational partner can also come in very handy, helping to reduce fuel costs and park or camping fees. But, if you have trouble finding similarly-minded outdoorsy friends, there are plenty of ways to reduce the costs associated with winter recreation.

If you really can’t afford the gas to get out of town, there are undoubtedly some local options you can take advantage of. I live in the biggest town in Montana, with very little snow fall and high relative urban density. Even if I lacked a vehicle, I could still head out to Two Moon Park on the east-end of town and go ice-skating on the Yellowstone River using public transportation. There are a number of city parks scattered around town, and additional opportunities exist just a few miles outside city boundaries. On weekends when I can afford to, I prefer to drive an hour south-west of Billings to Red Lodge for some quality time in the powder. It’s only about

120 miles round trip, so the fuel costs are still minimal even if I drive alone.

A lot of people associate skiing with pricey resort towns and expensive lift tickets. In reality, if you look for specials and rent skis locally before heading to the mountains, you can save a bundle. Cross-country skiing is another adventurous alternative; you can either stick to groomed trails that occasionally require a nominal entry fee (usually not over 5 bucks), or strike out on your own in the backcountry of National Forests and Parks. Renting an entire package for cross country skiing typically sets you back about 10 dollars.

If you really want an adventure, roll a ski or snowshoe outing into a weekend spent in one of over 100 Forest Service cabins around the state. Imagine spending an evening with a cup of hot chocolate and some s’mores nestled in a cabin in the heart of the Absarokee Mountains. The cabins are dirt cheap, starting at 20 bucks a night, and are usually equipped with a wood-burning stove and beds. Most cabins are accessible only by snow-mobile or on foot (or ski) in the winter, and can be reserved online.

Essentially, winter-time in Montana is anything but dull; you are limited only by your motivation and

imagination. Check out some recreational guide books in the library if you can’t afford to buy one, and ask around at the local outfitter shop for tips on meeting like-minded adventurers.

Short daylight hours and cold temperatures can really have a negative effect on your mood during the winter months if you just limit yourself to looking from the inside out. The key is to get outside on the weekends or stargaze from the comfort of a sleeping bag with a cup of hot cocoa just beyond the city limits on weeknights. Go pack a bag, throw in an extra pair of socks and a nice thick sweater and get outdoors, a winter wonderland is out there waiting for you.

MLK Day: Make it a Day ON, Not a Day OFF!

Compiled by Allison McKiernan from MLKDay.gov

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. sought to forge the common ground on which people from all walks of life could join together to address important community issues. On January 21st, 2008, millions of Americans across the country will once again honor his legacy by taking part in a wide range of service projects. Many of the projects started on King Day continue to engage volunteers beyond the holiday and impact the community year-round.

In 1994 Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act, designating the King Holiday as a national day of volunteer service. Instead of a day off from work or school, Congress asked Americans of all backgrounds and ages to celebrate Dr. King’s legacy by turning community concerns into citizen action.

The King Day of Service brings together people who might not ordinarily meet, breaks down barriers that have divided us in the past, leads to better understanding and ongoing relationships, and is an opportunity to recruit new volunteers for your ongoing work.

Although the scope of the event grows every year, many people still are not aware of the service component of the holiday. By encouraging the participation of as many organizations as possible, we hope to make next year’s King

Day of Service the biggest and best ever, engaging more people in service that honors Dr. King’s life and teachings.

If you are not already involved with a community service project for the King Day of Service here are some events happening state wide!

BILLINGS
Volunteers with RSVP and the Foster Grandparent Program will work with students at the Boys of Girls Club of Yellowstone County to make cards for soldiers stationed overseas from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. on Monday, January 21st. VISTA volunteers from area organizations will help to facilitate the project.

Billings Campus Corps, in honor of MLK Day, will celebrate age differences. On January 26th, Campus Corps members and recruited students will be playing Family Feud with the residents of St. Johns Lutheran Ministries Retirement Home from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM.

GREAT FALLS
Volunteers are needed to take Oral histories of RSVP volunteers. The purpose of this project is to help RSVP Staff gather information about the volunteers for volunteer recognition purposes.

RSVP Cartridge Recycling Organizing Party - Volunteers will organize ink and toner cartridges and prepare them for shipping to be recycled. This project reduces the community’s impact on the landfill, and will help raise

matching funds for the North Central MT Retired Senior Volunteer Program. Citizens are welcome to bring ink and toner cartridges, cell phones, newspaper, phone books, magazines, office paper, cardboard, and aluminum cans to be donated to RSVP to be recycled.


BOZEMAN
Bozeman will have a public screening of the award-winning civil rights documentary entitled Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks on January 21st, 2008.

BIG TIMBER
The Learn and Serve program at SGHS is recognizing student volunteers in community and church youth groups, student tutors and mentors, student leaders in youth organizations, etc. They are also holding a week-long drive for needed items for their local food bank.

HELENA
Carroll College’s Campus Corps members are having a diversity fair for elementary school children in the Helena area. The fair will include various activity booths where children can learn about Martin Luther King Jr., and the value of diversity in our world today. There will be performers and ethnic food donated by local restaurants.

HAVRE
An essay contest will take place and is open to all 6th through 8th grade students. The students are asked to select one of Martin Luther King Jr. quotes from four offered and

base a 300-500 word essay on that quote. The essays will be judged by SEA members from MSU-Northern and all entries are to be submitted to the MT Campus Corps office by January 8th. The winner will be announced on MLK Day and will receive a \$50.00 U.S. Savings Bond provided



by Wells Fargo Bank, a personalized plaque provided by MT Campus Corps, and an opportunity to be published in the Havre Daily News.

HAMILTON
An AmeriCorps team will be serving the Bitterroot Attention Home, a home for at risk youth, for MLK day. Donations will be presented and group activities dealing with prejudice and discrimination will be facilitated. Several projects around the house will be completed and dinner will be prepared. A prejudice reduction workshop will be facilitated by the National Coalition Building Institute.

SIDNEY
Communities in Action VISTAs will engage the community by passing out carnations to Richland County

residents to celebrate Random Acts of Kindness/MLK Day. The flowers are meant to inspired recipients to pass a good deed onto others in return. Volunteers are needed to pass out te carnations.

BROWNING
Graffiti will be removed at the College Campus Building, and the surrounding area will be cleaned up.

BUTTE
Montana Tech Campus Corps will be helping Suited for Success, a local nonprofit organization that provides interview and work clothing to low income men and women. They will be cleaning out their storage rooms, sorting though clothing and organizing the storage rooms.

MLK Day of Service is a way to transform Dr. King’s life and teachings into community service that helps empower and strengthen local communities. MLK Day of Service provides an opportunity for AmeriCorps members to reach out to and engage different populations and potential new partners. Make the most of this opportunity to promote community volunteering. When Americans work together with unity and purpose, great things happen.

These are just a few of the activities occurring statewide!

For contact information about any of these activities or to find additional events go to www.mlkday.gov.

Close of Service

Words of Wisdom

By Abby Zent

As I finish up my second year as a VISTA I have had the opportunity to reflect on my experience. For my first year of service I served as the Homeland Defense VISTA with the Cascade County Retired Senior Volunteer Program and I am completing my AmeriCorps service as the Prevention Resource Center VISTA Leader.

The last two years of service have provided me with many new experiences and has taught me a lot about myself, my community and Montana. Today I would like to share with you 10 things I have learned as a VISTA.

10. The Community Building lifecycle, the ‘CLAW,’ and everything else from PSO, CBI and IST. The most important thing I learned, though, is collaboration. Collaboration is the key to success. For example, 5 or 6 VISTAs can put together a very nice meal (ribs, corn on the cob, sweet potato fries, cornbread, etc) for less than \$10 each. However, if 1 person wanted to make the same meal or order it in a restaurant, it would cost a lot more than \$10.

9. The best way to find out current fire restrictions is not

the State of Montana website or the news. The best way to find out the current fire restrictions is to call the local non-emergency fire dispatch number.

8. Don’t be afraid to ask for a discount, donation, or, most importantly, help.

7. A 13 hour road trip with your supervisor and other site staff will either make or break your relationship. If the latter occurs hopefully it’s closer to the end of the trip and not at the beginning.

6. Stereotypes need to be forgotten because they generally come from a lack of knowledge. You need to know who you are dealing with, not who you think you are dealing with.

5. Be yourself, everyone else is taken.

4. It is not the end of the world if you are the first person to put a dent in the new company vehicle.

3. Maintain a sense of humor and be willing to be the brunt of humor, especially if you are the one that put the first dent in the new vehicle.

2. Don’t laugh at other people’s ideas no matter how crazy, silly or whacky you think they are.

When Geno said he wanted Ms. Montana to attend the Helena Global Youth Service Day event everyone laughed. Well, Geno got Ms. Montana at the Helena Global Youth Service Day event. Everyone was still laughing though because Geno missed Global Youth Service Day and Ms. Montana.

1. As VISTAs, we got things done, we made a difference and we impacted at least one life besides our own. Whether we recruited volunteers for mentoring programs, raised money and awareness for after-school programs or CASA, created a resource guide for single parents or implemented a new community program, WE got things done and WE have made a difference. It might not be apparent today, tomorrow or even next week but someday we will be reminded of the time we spent as a VISTA and we will see first-hand the impact we have made.

Serving as a VISTA for the last two years has taught me more things than I can even remember. I hope you are able to look back on your own VISTA experience and say the same thing.

Oh, and one more thing, sometimes dents pop out on their own.

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Project directors and supervisors continued the praise.

“You’ve left permanent footsteps in the state of Montana,” said Michelle Hauer, Project Director for Montana Legal Services Association, as she emphasized the “continuous, exponential effect” of the contribution made by VISTAs.

“I don’t know if you can get tired of hearing ‘We love you and we don’t want you to leave,’” said Cody Lillstrom, Campus Compact Project Director, “But it’s true.”

Brent Wilson served as the Volunteer Development Specialist for Family Promise in Bozeman. His project entailed coordinating volunteers and developing materials for recruitment and training among other things.

Ray Ross, President of the Board of Family Promise, said, “I don’t think we’d have been as successful as we’ve been without Brent.” Ross went on to say, “Thank you for the people you have helped and thank you for the people you will help.”

Among the graduating VISTAs were five members of the AmeriCorps Member Advisory Council. On behalf of the remaining ACMACers, I would like to thank Katie McKeown, Gene Donney, Allison McKiernan, Abby Zent and Max Miller for their time, dedication and friendship.

This was Katie McKeown’s third term with AmeriCorps, but her first as a VISTA.

“Being a VISTA with Montana Conservation Corps has been a great opportunity to become acquainted with the non-profit world and gain new skills ranging from program development to backcountry camping,” said McKeown. “VISTA has broadened my world view and helped me form a clearer picture of what I hope to accomplish in the future.”

In an article outlining extensive praise and appreciation, I think it appropriate to end with a note of encouragement.

Mary Caferro, the Executive Director of WEEL and keynote speaker, challenged outgoing VISTAs to “use your intelligence and do good work...build community and make the world a better place.”



The five graduating ACMACers: Katie McKeown, Gene Donney, Allison McKiernan, Abby Zent and Max Miller (left to right).



Rachel Conn (center) partnered with Kathryn Huchison (not pictured) on the Growing Community Project. Olivia Riutta (right), a prior VISTA with WEEL, supervised Rachel. Mary Caferro (left), a former VISTA with WEEL, now serves as their executive director and was the keynote speaker at Close of Service.

We want you to read this newsletter, so let us know what we can do to make it more entertaining and informative. We want your contributions in terms of ideas, articles, and photos. If there’s something you’re planning or some event you need volunteers for... lets us know and we’ll get it out!

Send your ideas, articles, photos to Ashley at astevick@mtlsa.org.



Katie McKeown and Brent Wilson.



Angela Hansen of Voices of hope in Great Falls is pictured here with Jana Lehman (left). Jana served as the Community Education Coordinator, informing the community about Voices of Hope’s services as well as community resources available to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Some pictures are just worth sharing...



Please send your photos to Ashley at astevick@mtlsa.org